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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001110

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DEPT FOR EAP/MTS, INR/EAP, INR/B

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE OPPOSITION: BITTER TOWARD PRESIDENT
ARROYO AND STILL DIVIDED

REF: A. MANILA 0995

[B. MANILA 0889](#)

[C. MANILA 0830](#)

[D. 05 MANILA 5947](#)

Classified By: Acting Pol/C Joseph L. Novak for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1. \(C\) Summary:](#) In recent meetings, Opposition politicians told poloffs that they will continue to denounce President Arroyo for her recent imposition (since rescinded) of a State of National Emergency, asserting that it was poorly calibrated to meet the nature of any threat posed at the time. They strongly deny Malacanang claims that the Opposition is working with the hard left in an effort to undermine the government. In terms of next steps, they assert that they will again bring impeachment charges against Arroyo at the first opportunity this summer. Based on these soundings, the Opposition clearly remains fragmented, on the defensive and seemingly without a firm plan on how to counter Malacanang. End Summary.

Critical of Malacanang

[2. \(C\) In recent meetings with poloffs, members of the mainstream Opposition bitterly denounced President Arroyo's imposition of a State of National Emergency \(Proclamation 1017\) on February 24, asserting that the move was poorly calibrated to meet any threat posed at the time. In a March 8 meeting with poloff, Ramon "Eki" Cardenas, a supporter of former president Joseph Estrada, claimed that the proclamation "severely" threatened civil liberties. Ronnie Zamora, an Opposition Congressman, told Acting Pol/C on March 9 that the State of National Emergency was a form of "creeping authoritarianism," a reference to tactics used by President Marcos during his second term, which ultimately resulted in the declaration of Martial Law in September 1972. Despite the lifting of the State of National Emergency on March 3, Zamora vowed that the Opposition would press forward with its legal challenges to the proclamation and how it was implemented. The Supreme Court is currently hearing several petitions challenging the constitutionality of Proclamation 1017 and a ruling is expected within the next two weeks.](#)

[3. \(C\) Cardenas also told poloff that he believed the brief State of National Emergency was meant as "a warning" to President Arroyo's opponents that they should back off on criticism of her. He asserted, however, that Arroyo's actions had only strengthened the Opposition's resolve to](#)

remove her from office. Cardenas said Opposition members were not afraid of the possibility of being arrested, adding defiantly, "the jails can only hold so many." Expressing a view held by others in the Opposition, Congressman Alan Cayetano told Acting Pol/C that he was optimistic that Malacanang would make "a mistake" and "overstretch," at which point the Opposition would take advantage of the situation.

14. (C) Contacts also asserted that there were various conflicting rumors circulating about the USG and the local political situation. These rumors ran the gamut from reports that Embassy or USG officials had quietly given the green light to the State of National Emergency, been involved at high-levels to urge that the military remain loyal to the chain of command, and even that the USG had supported a "coup plot." Poloffs underscored that the USG policy was not to intervene.

Denying Links with the Left

15. (C) Contacts strongly deny Malacanang claims that anti-Arroyo forces are working with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA) in an effort to oust the government. In a March 9 chat with poloff, former presidential candidate and leader of the "Jesus is Lord" religious movement Brother Eddie Villanueva scoffed at the idea that the Philippine military would align themselves with Communist rebels, whom they have been fighting for decades. Lito Banayo, a close associate of Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson, asserted that Malacanang was using the specter of a leftist plot to justify its actions in going after perceived

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enemies in the mainstream Opposition. Contacts did assert, however, that certain (unnamed) members of the Opposition might be "in communication" with "disgruntled" members of the military. Poloffs underscored that it was vital that the military respect civilian control and honor the chain of command. Cayetano, Zamora, and others expressed concern that the CPP/NPA was benefiting from increasing political polarization.

Next Steps for Opposition

16. (C) In terms of next steps, Zamora asserted that the Opposition would again bring impeachment charges against Arroyo at the first opportunity this summer. (Note: Per the Philippine Constitution, the earliest opportunity would be mid-July, one year after the filing of the last set of charges, which were dismissed by the House in September 2005. End Note.) The new impeachment complaint, he said, would likely recycle old charges of abuse of power and cheating during the 2004 presidential election timeframe. In addition, Zamora related, the Opposition plans to bring new charges stemming from a March 1 Senate committee report that states that officials in the Department of Agriculture illegally diverted funds from a national fertilizer fund, which may have found their way into Arroyo presidential campaign coffers in 2004 (ref D).

17. (C) Cayetano added that the Opposition was planning to sponsor further rallies against President Arroyo, though given the lackluster turnout at demonstrations in the recent past, he had little hope of drawing big crowds. Villanueva told poloff that "the masses" were dissatisfied with President Arroyo, but were unable to find a rallying point, given the lack of a single unifying leader in the Opposition movement. The Opposition, he commented, was still "fractured" and held together only by their desire to unseat President Arroyo. Contacts admitted that disorganization, infighting and funding problems were endemic for the Opposition and prevented joint planning and a combined effort

against the President.

Comment

18. (C) Based on these discussions and other soundings, the Opposition clearly remains divided and without clear leadership. They also remain on the defensive due to Malacanang's recent actions and seemingly without a firm plan on how to hit back. That said, they seem optimistic that President Arroyo may be overreaching and, in effect, may provoke a backlash against her government down the line. Their denial of any link with the CPP/NPA seemed straightforward, though their murmurings that some in the Opposition might be in touch with elements of the military were disturbing.

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